

My Experience in the Salt Lake Temple

Lee Anderson – 1/8/2015

I had the opportunity to work on the remodel of the fire sprinkler system in the Salt Lake Temple in the summer of 2012. They were adding air conditioning on the east tower and in the Solemn Assembly Hall. While they were opening the walls, ceilings and floors to make room for the ductwork they were also replacing and rerouting the old fire sprinkler piping. I was working on the design of the remodeled sprinkler system.

It was very humbling to be able to be a small part of the history of that amazing structure. It was neat to see the wooden pegs and other construction methods that were used during the original construction. They numbered the granite blocks so they could keep track of where each stone would be placed. One of these numbers can still be seen on a block on the wall in the attic above the Solemn Assembly Hall.

During the demolition phase of the project the Temple was still in use so the work had to be done during the night. To prevent unnecessary water damage the fire sprinkler system was shut down during the demolition in case one of the pipes was accidentally broken. Because there was no fire protection, someone had to be there as a fire watch. I was asked to perform that task.

There was about six to eight of us working each night. My job was to stay in the cafeteria most of the time so I could be easily found in case I needed to turn the fire sprinkler system back on. It was about halfway from where the work was being done on the fifth floor and the basement where the riser was. The rest of the guys were involved with the demolition. I didn't mind being in the cafeteria because it was air-conditioned. The upper floors where the work was being done was unbearably hot; upper 90's, even in the middle of the night with all the big round windows open. I can't imagine how hot it must have been for the early Saints meeting in the Solemn Assembly Hall.

Every night a cleaning crew came through the Temple but they were usually through by 11:00 pm. The rest of the night it was just us construction workers in the building. Once every hour I walked through all floors of the Temple to make sure there weren't any problems. I hate to admit it but walking through the dark, empty Temple by myself at night was a little unnerving. I'm not saying it was creepy or anything like that but I was well aware of all the spiritual manifestations that happen in that sacred place and I wasn't quite ready to round a corner and meet someone from the other side of the veil.

I thoroughly enjoyed being able to walk through the Temple and admire the beautiful workmanship. The Solemn Assembly Hall was really neat. Many prophets and apostles through the years have met there. There is a special feeling in that room. I spent quite a bit of time studying the murals in the Creation and World rooms. There were many paintings and old photographs in frames in the basement leaning against the walls. Many of the photographs were of the construction of the Temple through the years.

While James Talmage was writing the book, Jesus the Christ, he had a modest apartment in the east tower of the Temple. While standing in his old apartment I could imagine him busily working on the book and walking the quiet halls of the Temple seeking inspiration. It was very humbling being in that sacred edifice surrounded by so much history.

I have been able to design the fire sprinkler systems for the Ogden and Payson Temples which was a very special experience but nothing compares to the two weeks I was able to do the fire watch in the Salt Lake Temple.